

What's New with

SCHOOL COMMODITIES

A NEWSLETTER FROM USDA's FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

From the Food Distribution Director

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has launched an unprecedented initiative to transform the commodity distribution programs. It is called Food Distribution 2000: Transforming Food Distribution for the Next Millennium. We have linked with our customers (schools, Indian reservations, and other nutrition assistance sites) and our partners to reinvent the programs. Our goal is to make the programs become more streamlined and cost effective, use staff more efficiently, and provide outstanding customer service. Transformation teams were comprised of our customer and partner representatives and led by professionals with extensive experience in effectuating change.

Three teams were formed: (1) the Commodity Ordering Reinvention Team, which was directed to improve service significantly to our school customers; (2) the Commodity Hold and Recall Team, which was tasked to find a better way to perform holds and recalls when we have a food safety or quality problem with commodities; and (3) the FDPIR 2000 Team, which was formed to deal with improving the health and well-being of program participants in FDPIR.

The Commodity Improvement Council's Under Secretaries: Shirley Watkins, Mike Dunn, Gus

Schumacher, and Catherine Woteki are overseeing this transformation project.

Regardless of the outcome of this effort, USDA will continue to buy and remove commodities from specific agriculture markets in need of support at appropriate times, at least at current levels. In addition, service to schools and other customers will be improved.

A Web site is available to keep you up to date on this exciting transformation initiative. The site has historical information on how the project evolved, a description of the teams and their most current status reports, and frequently asked questions and answers. Check in for regular updates. To visit the site, the address is <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/menu/fd2000/fd2000.htm>. If you do not have access to the Internet, you can contact your State distributing agency for more information.

Success stories

In this issue, we have highlighted several "success stories" from around the country on various components of the commodity nutrition programs. For example, DOD's Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Project grew from a pilot project in just a few States several years ago to a nationwide program. The project encourages students to try a variety of fresh, American-grown products.

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We are featuring several articles about USDA's cooperative agreements for food recovery projects in NSLP. USDA awarded a total of \$97,179 to 12 school districts for a 1-year agreement to help initiate or increase food recovery in NSLP. We have highlighted three of the selected school districts in this issue.

We have also included articles about maximizing your commodities and entitlement dollars, and one where food service directors share tips for success. We are interested in sharing good ideas with others. Please feel free to tell us your own success stories. You can e-mail us any time at fdd-pst@fns.usda.gov.

Food safety

Food safety remains one of our top priorities. In this issue, we tell you what new procedures we have

adopted to handle situations where products have been placed on hold because of a possible food safety problem. These new procedures are possible because of a change in the law. Also, as a part of Food Distribution 2000, USDA's initiative to transform the commodity nutrition programs, we formed a Commodity Hold and Recall Team. This team was also responsible for recommending changes that would result in fewer holds and recalls, quicker commodity pickups from schools, and quicker reimbursements. Check our Web site for the latest report from this team.

We are also including some useful resources to help you prepare and serve food safely. Additionally, USDA has received funds specifically earmarked for food safety education.

Improving customer service

We are continuing to develop ways to improve customer service to schools. Inside you will find articles about our new long-term contracting process for purchasing cheeses, as well as the "best value" procurement system. These new systems are steps in the direction for improving on-time deliveries and consistency and quality of the commodities we provide.

If you have questions or comments, please let us know.

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Schoolchildren Are Very Excited About Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

You may recall that several years ago only a few States participated in USDA's/DOD's Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Project as a pilot. Since then, the pilot has grown into a nationwide program with 31 States and Guam participating last year. This program permits States to set aside a portion of their commodity entitlement to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables through DOD/DSCP for NSLP. (DSCP has a nationwide system for the purchase and distribution of produce to military installations, Federal prisons, and veterans hospitals.) These States or schools place orders directly with DSCP's field offices for a variety of Ameri-

can-grown, fresh products. And orders can be placed for specific delivery dates.

From the beginning, this program has been very successful, and schools have been excited about the availability of a large and extensive variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. The items offered are reported to be less costly and fresher than much of the local produce available to schools. The high quality and affordability of the food is evidenced by the fact that many school purchasing cooperatives are now participating in the program.

DOD's DSCP field offices provide a wide variety of items that

they purchase and distribute on a daily basis. Schools are pleased with the short lead time between ordering and delivery of the produce, as well as timely deliveries and responsive customer service.

In many cases, school staff have been surprised to find that students are actually eating and enjoying the new assortment of fresh offerings, and parents are always supportive of schools' efforts to include more nutritious choices on lunch menus. Many children have been introduced to new fruits and vegetables through the program. Kiwi, pineapple, grapes, apples, melons, and

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Is this a smile? A happy student at William Wirt Middle School, Riverdale, Maryland, begins to enjoy her salad selections.

citrus fruits are some of the choices offered at fruit bars or in individually packed servings. Salad bars are stocked with baby carrots, broccoli florets, zucchini, cucumbers, and cherry tomatoes made available through the program.

The project is being mentioned in newsletters and was even discussed at a board meeting of the Centennial School District in Portland, Oregon. Two elementary school principals in Centennial District gave glowing testimonials about how much students and staff are enjoying meals now with the variety and abundance of fresh produce. Parents in the audience were very pleased to learn that the government implemented a very worthwhile program that also improved something close to home and, in particular, a program for children.

CiJi Dieringer, a fourth grader at Centennial's Harold Oliver Intermediate School, is one student who approves of the fresh fruits and vegetables. CiJi wrote a letter thanking the cooks at her school for the wonderful meals they offer. "Thank you for making my lunch good; I like eating in your cafeteria," she wrote. CiJi made special mention of star fruit and kiwi now included in the fruit and veggie bars at Harold Oliver.

Sheila Hanson, Centennial School District's dining services manager, hopes to see the program continue and expand in the future. Hanson said "It is very heartwarming to see students eating and enjoying fresh fruits and vegetables. It is especially enjoyable to introduce new fruits and vegetables to students and staff." Hanson thinks of the dining room as an extension of the classroom. She feels that part of the school day should be spent in educating children in proper nutrition by offering them a large variety of fresh produce for their meals.

The importance of good nutrition continues to be a major issue for all of us, especially children. Healthful diets contribute to better school performance and improved lifelong eating habits. The expansion of this pilot into a successful program is an excellent example of progress that can be made through partnerships at all levels of the commodity distribution system. ■

USDA Cooperative Agreements To Promote Food Recovery in Schools

For the last several years, USDA has taken a very active and aggressive role in encouraging antihunger programs through food recovery and gleaning. Food recovery is the collection of wholesome food for redistribution to the poor and hungry. It follows a basic humanitarian ethic that has been part of societies for centuries. We know that "gleaning," or gathering after the harvest, goes back at least as far as biblical days. Today, however, the terms "gleaning" and "food recovery" cover a variety of different efforts. The four most common methods are:

1. *Field Gleaning* - The collection of crops from farmers' fields that have already been mechanically harvested or on fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest.
2. *Perishable Food Rescue or Salvage* - The collection of perishable produce from wholesale and retail sources.
3. *Food Rescue* - The collection of prepared foods from the food service industry.
4. *Nonperishable Food Collection* - The collection of processed foods with long shelf lives.

According to USDA's Economic Research Service, more than 96 billion pounds of food are wasted annually in the United States. To address this problem, the Depart-

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ment sponsored a National Summit for Food Recovery and Gleaning in the fall of 1997. The Department also published a citizen's guide to food recovery, worked with the National Restaurant Association to publish a food recovery guide for restaurants, and worked with other Federal agencies to encourage more food donations. USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Shirley Watkins said that USDA and its partners in the food recovery initiative made a commitment to increase by 33 percent the amount of food recovered by the year 2000.

As part of USDA's overall Food Recovery and Gleaning Initiative, in July 1998 Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced the names of school districts that were selected to receive USDA funding to help initiate or increase food recovery in NSLP. The awards were based on the district's ability to recover food cost-effectively, develop best practices that they can share with other schools, and

involve students in community service. Most of the school districts formed partnerships with other local nonprofit or public agencies such as boy and girl scouts' councils or food banks. A total of \$97,179 was awarded to 12 school districts to participate in this project under a 1-year agreement.

The schools selected were: Iowa City Community School District, Iowa City, Iowa; Keystone Oaks School District, Pittsburgh, PA; Ohio County Public Schools, Wheeling, WVA; Norwich Public Schools, Norwich, CT; Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa, OK; Memphis City Schools, Memphis, TN; Clarendon School District Two, Manning, SC; Madison Metropolitan School District, Madison, WI; Lawrence Union School Free School District, Lawrence, NY; Albany County School District One, Laramie, WY; Hewlett-Woodmere Union Public School District, Hewlett, NY; and Wichita Public Schools, Wichita, KS. There are articles in this newsletter that highlight some of

the ways these selected schools are using USDA's funding to initiate or increase food recovery.

"The goal of these awards is to overcome obstacles that prevent schools from donating excess food from their cafeterias and to find ways to make donations possible for any school," said Secretary Glickman. "These awards will educate students about food recovery and encourage them to get involved and volunteer." All of the 12 schools either began or continued some innovative and creative projects to integrate and increase food recovery in NSLP. The schools were very excited about receiving these funds, and they have enthusiastically worked with local community organizations as partners to make this project a success. We plan to incorporate all their success stories in a "best practices" manual and make it available nationwide later in this year. This "best practices" manual should guide other schools in initiating food recovery in NSLP. ▀

Ohio County Public Schools

The Ohio County Public School District in Wheeling, West Virginia, received nearly \$9,000 from USDA to expand, publicize, and promote food recovery efforts in its schools. The school system already had a curriculum that provided food recovery education to high school students that was taught in social studies classes.

Superintendent H. Lawrence Jones said the pilot program was undertaken in order to donate food to the Soup Kitchen of the Upper

Ohio Valley in the summer of 1994. He said the program has been very successful with excess food taken to agencies around the county. Jones further pointed out that despite efficient planning practices, the school district occasionally has already prepared perishable leftovers that cannot be used. The primary recipient of donated food is the Wheeling Soup Kitchen. "This funding from USDA goes back to our original efforts to recycle our unused food at the cafeterias," Jones

said. "This has been a pilot program that we can truly say has been very beneficial to all involved."

"The community agencies were very willing to work within the perimeters of the program guidelines," said James Freeland, director of Child Nutrition for Ohio County Public Schools. According to Freeland, donating food to the needy is relatively easy for a school system. Volunteers call the kitchens to determine if there is any leftover

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food for the day. If so, the child nutrition staff packages the food items in containers provided by the agency delivering the food. Volunteers then come for the packaged food and deliver it to the soup kitchen where, in turn, it is either served or distributed elsewhere.

The school district has two central kitchens that provide food to its 14 schools, one of which was already involved in the original gleaning process. The funds helped provide the resources needed to include the second kitchen in the program. It enabled the school

system to inform the community and other school districts, statewide and nationally, about food recovery. The program allowed Ohio County to convey the importance of nutrition and to create an awareness that encourages businesses and other institutions to participate in food recovery. The curriculum was extended into the middle and elementary schools.

Ohio County Schools developed a brochure that outlines the program for other districts to follow. "The brochure helped us to publicize the food recovery program in

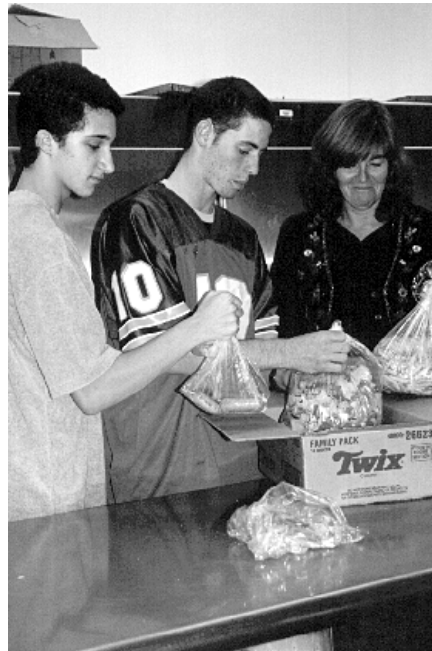
our county," said Freeland. A video on the district's food recovery program is in the process of being produced.

The success of this program has resulted in the child nutrition staff focusing additional attention on the management principle of preparing one meal per child per meal service. Homeless persons have benefited nutritionally from this program. Equally important, student educational gains regarding awareness of environmental resources and human needs have been positive. ■

Lawrence Public Schools

USDA awarded \$9,750 to the Lawrence Union Free School District in Lawrence, New York, to purchase equipment and supplies and to develop a series of educational tools promoting food recovery efforts in schools. In 1997, Lawrence was one of the first school systems nationwide to begin a process of collecting and distributing its unused food from school meals to those in need. As part of its "Rock and Wrap It Up! School Program," staff members and students collect the food from each school and deliver it to the Five Towns Community Center, where it is distributed to families and senior citizens.

"I have been very impressed with the level of support our program has received from the students and staff of Lawrence," said "Rock and Wrap It Up!"



Rock and Wrap It Up! volunteers—students and supervisor of the Lawrence, New York, district school lunch program—pack excess food for the poor.

founder and Lawrence Board of Education trustee Mr. Syd Mandelbaum. "Their efforts last year enabled the community center to distribute 100 to 200 meals every week, using food that may have otherwise been discarded."

"Rock and Wrap It Up!" began its efforts in 1991, addressing the issue of unused food at major music concerts. Students have collected food from major local events, including concerts and political functions. Lawrence's efforts have earned national recognition, including coverage on MTV and *Time Magazine for Kids*. Today, the organization collects food from nearly every major concert in the United States and abroad, distributing more than 3 million meals worldwide.

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Lawrence Union Free School District plans to share its educational publications promoting food recovery and its “best practices” with USDA to help other schools nationwide develop food recovery programs. Not only do our efforts help to provide meals for the hungry,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Paul Kelleher, “this program reinforces the importance of volunteerism while bringing much needed attention to the issue of hunger in our country.” ■

Tulsa Public Schools

Tulsa Public Schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, received \$10,000 from USDA to help initiate or increase food recovery in NSLP. The money was utilized to start a program called Schools Helping Advance the Redistribution of Edibles (S.H.A.R.E.). The S.H.A.R.E. program was initially implemented in September 1998 at 20 school sites. By the end of the school year, all 85 school sites were involved in the program.

In partnership with Table to Table, a program of Tulsa Community Food Bank, S.H.A.R.E. transfers leftover food from school cafeterias directly to area charities such as soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters in the Tulsa area. “It’s food that is edible but not marketable. For someone who needs food, it’s totally appropriate,” said Joe Reger, director of Child Nutrition for Tulsa Public Schools. “We may have five chicken sandwiches one day and a couple of slices of pizza the next day. Instead of throwing it

away, we can wrap it, date it, and freeze it for someone else,” Reger said.

Food safety is an important component of the program. Since leftover food is at higher risk for foodborne illness, cafeteria employees are trained in safe food handling techniques. The schools follow food safety procedures modeled after HACCP systems. “This grant has enabled us to purchase additional supplies and packaging equipment to ensure the food remains safe,” said Reger. “We’re setting up a program that will have a long-term impact.”

Another objective of the S.H.A.R.E. program is to provide the student population with opportunities to become active community members. Students may ride along in refrigerated trucks that pick up the leftover food. They are encouraged to become involved in the collection and distribution of food during the holidays or in other designated food drives. The goal is to raise the students’ awareness of hunger in the community.

Additionally, the S.H.A.R.E. program has developed a curriculum for elementary-age students entitled “Beyond The Facts—A Hunger and Nutrition Curriculum for Elementary School Students.” The goal is to educate elementary-age children about domestic hunger and the health implications associated with hunger. It promotes healthful eating and empowers students to become actively involved in community service. ■

Misconceptions About Food Recovery

There are several misconceptions regarding participation of school districts in food recovery programs. These have to be overcome if such participation is to be successful:

1. **Huge amounts of food are involved.** Cheryl Sturgeon, director of School and Community Nutrition Services for Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, said a survey in her district several years ago found the amount of donated food totaled less than 5 pounds per week per participating school site. She added that the donation numbers for more recent years are comparable. “It’s not a big quantity when you look at the size of our program, but at the same time that small amount of food can be very important to someone who has nothing to eat,” she said.
2. **The donation program will be disruptive to the school meal program operation.** “The community agencies were very willing to work within the perimeters of the program guidelines,” said James Freeland, director of Child Nutrition for Ohio County Public Schools in Wheeling, West Virginia. “We were apprehensive that the agency that would be picking up the leftover food would find it necessary to come during our lunch periods. But they never came without calling first. They

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would phone after the school lunches were served to ask if there was any leftover food. There's little or no extra labor for us," said Freeland.

3. **School meal program managers will begin producing excess food specifically to be donated.** "Our instructions to

our managers are the same as always," said Sturgeon. "Our business practice is to produce sufficient food to feed all the students who want to eat with minimal amount of leftovers."

4. **Well-managed programs have no waste.** "No matter how well you manage there is always

waste," said Sturgeon. "Thirty slices of excess pizza in a school that feeds 800 kids—that's a very acceptable level. We first attempt to serve a leftover food on the next day or to recycle it into another item (hot dog buns can be made into croutons, for example). If we can't do either, we donate it." ■

Long-term Purchasing Contracts Offer Improved Customer Service

Last March 1999, FSA—the USDA agency that buys our dairy, grains, oil, pasta, and peanut commodities—announced the implementation of long-term contracts for the purchase of certain process, cheddar, and mozzarella cheeses. This new contract process began with May 1999 invitations for deliveries from July 1999 through June 2000. For some time, FSA had explored the possibility of entering into long-term contracts for purchases of certain commodities. Under this system, an invitation for bid is announced for a period of 6 months or a year, and vendors can bid any part of the period based on their planned production schedules.

Thus, long-term contracts enable USDA to improve customer service to schools. The primary advantage to schools is consistency. The consistent availability of a high-quality product and on-time

deliveries is ensured. Also, these contracts strengthen and improve partnerships and relationships between USDA and industry. Vendors can reserve certain quantities of product for USDA for extended periods of time, and USDA does not have to announce purchases every month. Additionally, long-term contracts allow vendors more lead-time to plan and produce the product. This eliminates the problem that USDA has sometimes faced in recent years with the unpredictable availability of cheese.

Because of long-term contracts for purchases of cheese, schools should be receiving on-time deliveries of this popular commodity. This enables schools to plan their menus with a variety of entrees that students love and eat. Also, an ongoing relationship between USDA and vendors contributes to a higher level of customer service to schools. This single change in purchasing, which has resulted in several distinct improvements in service, is an excellent example of the value and importance of good partnerships at every level of the commodity distribution system. ■

"Best Value" Purchasing

Last fall, AMS awarded a contract for 25 truckloads (1,000,000 pounds) of cooked beef pot roast through a competitive negotiation which AMS has termed a "best value" procurement. This product was distributed in NSLP as a bonus item.

As with all competitive negotiations, under a "best value" procurement, this product was selected based on the best value for the cost. The criteria for evaluating the product were included in the Request for Proposal (RFP), and along with the technical and cost proposals, suppliers were also required to submit a sample roast. The technical proposal consisted of (1) a complete description of the raw material and process used in production of the sample roast in accordance with the checklist of requirements, (2) a description of the quality assurance procedures, and (3) the company's past performance history.

AMS representatives, a local school food service worker, a county supervisor for Food Service Operations, and students evaluated the

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sample roasts and scored each sample for tenderness, flavor, appearance, and packaging integrity. A USDA technical team evaluated the technical proposals. An award was made to the supplier whose proposal represented the best value to USDA using the criteria identified in the RFP. As stated in the RFP, the technical merit, including the quality of product, was considered significantly more important than cost.

This type of procurement works well when purchasing further processed items when several variables can affect the quality and cost of the product. However, it requires extensive time in reviewing samples, proposals, and resubmission of proposals and final offers following the negotiation stage. Thus, while it may be used for certain procurements, it can't replace competitive bid purchases when emergency surplus removal to bolster producer prices is a co-objective in the procurement program. States or local agencies that would like to use competitive negotiation in this way should ensure that this method is not prohibited by State law. Many States and local agencies are achieving good results using taste testing under an Invitation for Bid procurement, so there are other options available if State law prohibits the use of competitive negotiation.

The Department is now also purchasing entitlement peanut butter under this procedure. We are likely to purchase additional products in the future under "best value" contracting to ensure schools receive the highest quality products that will be the most acceptable to children. ■

Food Service Directors Share Tips for Success

Many factors must be considered in order to manage a school lunch or school breakfast program successfully. Nutritional requirements, of course, are paramount, and schoolchildren's tastes and preferences are also important.

Differences in school policies govern acceptance and storage of commodities. Many lunches are prepared at central locations and satellited to schools while some are prepared on-site. Some State distributing agencies make more up-front decisions than others, leaving less discretion to local food service directors. In some areas of the country, schools have costly storage space, or minimum freezer space, or less available labor, or a dozen other situations that must be taken into account. It can't be forgotten that food service operations are now expected to support themselves, either completely or in part. A few practices of successful food service directors are included here as suggestions for everyone.

A successful school lunch program is one that carefully controls costs and meets students' nutritional requirements with little plate waste. Possibly the single most important factor in a successful operation is using every available resource. Successful school districts make maximum use of entitlement and bonus commodities. They know that spending the commodity food dollar wisely is just as important as other procurement decisions.

The various ways commodities are used today are changing. Schools are using less oil because fewer foods are fried. Some shortening is still used in baking breads, but it is being partially replaced in many dessert items by commodity fruit purees. Sweet potatoes are baked into biscuits, and figs are offered on salad bars.

Commodities are never wasted. In some cases, districts accept additional shares of commodities after other districts' first refusals. Depending on the local population, student tastes may vary widely within a district, and an appreciative audience can be found for most foods. The directors and staffs operating food service departments in schools often have their own libraries of recipes, including the new USDA's *A Tool Kit for Healthy School Meals: Recipes and Training Materials*. They also take advantage of the variety of recipes and serving suggestions found in commercial publications, association magazines, and on the Internet. A recipe exchange page has been added to FDP's Web site for the purpose of sharing recipes and serving suggestions for ways to use commodities. Successful directors meet the challenge of including commodities in meals the students like and want.

Some food service directors plan menus on monthly or 6-week cycles with the help of students and parents, student groups, or with classroom participation. This involves children in planning school lunches, soliciting their input and immediate feedback on popular or not-so-popular menu items, and

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helping to minimize storage costs by using available commodities quickly. When labor costs are high or cooking facilities are limited, directors often take advantage of State processing contracts. Even when some or all of their schools prepare lunches on-site, they may find it advantageous to process cheese and ground beef, for example, into pizza or canned fruit into a variety of dessert items. Before making processing decisions,

successful directors study the cost and acceptability of processed products vs. on-site preparation.

Increased availability of ready-to-serve fresh fruits and vegetables, through both local outlets and the joint USDA project with DOD, has made school lunches more attractive to many students. The USDA/DOD project is discussed in a separate article in this issue. Salad bars, potato bars, and dessert bars are examples of serving methods

that incorporate nutritional advantages into offerings that appeal to a wide spectrum of the school population.

Perhaps a new idea has presented itself to you here. Or perhaps you have one of your own to share. We encourage food service personnel and other interested parties to communicate with us at fdd-pst@fns.usda.gov to share any ideas, comments, or suggestions. ■

Good Nutrition Feeds Successful Learning

USDA's "Healthy Eating Helps You Make the Grade" campaign is our effort to educate principals, teachers, parents, and children in the importance of nutrition to learning. Teachers and principals have said it for years: hungry, poorly nourished children cannot learn; children who aren't hungry feel better, learn better, and behave better. In order to succeed and excel, they need to have a nutritious breakfast every morning and a healthful lunch every day. Food provides the body with the fuel it needs to perform. How can we expect children to be their best if they are operating on empty calories or no food at all?

Team Nutrition Connections, Volume V, Number 1, which was distributed to all schools in February 1999, speaks directly to principals about the importance of good nutrition to their students' overall success and well-being. In his cover letter, Gerald Tirozzi, former assistant secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, makes

the point that "Healthful eating not only prevents childhood and adolescent health problems, such as obesity and eating disorders, it helps young people grow, develop, and do well in school."

FNS, through the Team Nutrition initiative, is encouraging principals to assess the nutrition environment of their schools and to make changes where appropriate.



Children are naturally curious learners when they are well nourished, as you can see by these students at Templeton Elementary School, Riverdale, Maryland. All children deserve our serious attention to their nutrition environment.

Some of the areas targeted are the menu choices, dining room environments, vending machines, breakfast availability, physical activity, and the existence of a school nutrition policy. By going through the checklist of questions in the last issue of *Team Nutrition Connections*, the principals will begin to consider all the issues surrounding nutrition and the important role it plays in their students' future.

The fall issue of *Team Nutrition Connections* will focus on team building and will provide some helpful information on who should be on the school nutrition team and how to recruit members for specific functions. Teams are the support groups needed to be successful, and they serve to pull in participants from outside the school to be part of the education process.

Schools continue to enroll in Team Nutrition as they see the multiple benefits of a positive nutrition policy. Our objective is to see all schools participate in Team Nutrition. Visit our home page at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn> to review some of the activities happening in schools across the country and the materials available. ■

USDA Improves System for Handling Commodities With Possible Problems

We are continuing to improve how we handle problems with commodities, especially when there is a potential health or safety risk. As part of Food Distribution 2000, USDA's initiative to transform the commodity distribution programs, we formed the Commodity Hold and Recall Team. The purpose of this team was to reinvent the way we handle recalls and holds on commodities. After assessing existing operations, the team identified reinvention opportunities and recommended changes to improve the system.

The team's work resulted in system changes that will help us to identify commodities that may pose a health or safety risk more quickly and to remove the affected product from local schools in a more timely manner. Also, we will be able to reimburse States and local schools promptly for expenses incurred with storing and transporting these commodities. To read the team's final report, please visit the Web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/menu/fd2000/teamhold.htm>.

Don Trumble, a school lunch director in Hagerstown, Maryland, was a member of the team. He brought the perspective of a local school with much knowledge of the kinds of problems facing schools when food must be held and recalled. According to Don, "This new process quickly removes

product to prevent accidental use and assures quick reimbursement to nonprofit programs for their expenses."

Because of the problems States were facing whenever food had to be held and recalled, USDA worked to have the law changed. Funds are now available to reimburse States for costs associated with removal of USDA commodities when they pose a health or safety risk. These costs may include costs for storage, transportation, processing, and destruction. This provision will be effective for a trial period until October 1, 2000.

Funding Is Appropriated for Food Safety Education

FNS provides program operators with more educational materials to prepare food safely. Congress has made funds available for food safety education. FNS is using these funds by working with NFSMI to coordinate a number of projects in order to bring program operators valuable and useful food safety information. Projects undertaken and planned include:

- Useful materials - In August, a teleconference refresher course was given on basic, safe food preparation for front-line food service workers. Materials will be distributed as a followup to the teleconference, including a video of the conference.

- *Serving It Safe: A Manager's Tool Kit* will be updated using the 1999 Food Code. The updated pages will be distributed to all school food authorities.
- Laminated pocket cards and other materials highlighting food safety topics will be developed and distributed to all schools for prominent display in the food service preparation areas.
- USDA's quantity foods' recipes will be analyzed to identify the critical control points using HACCP principles.
- Several projects are under discussion to introduce HACCP concepts geared to a school food service setting.

We are pleased about the availability of these funds specifically designated for food safety education! And we are optimistic that these materials and initiatives will be great additions to the existing food safety materials and guidance. This is a part of our continual efforts to emphasize the importance of food safety education and meet the needs of our customers. ■



Food safety education is vital to food service operators like these at William Wirt Middle School, Riverdale, Maryland. They and other operators are protecting our children's health.

Let Temperature Be Your *Only* Guide When Cooking Hamburgers

Investigation by USDA has now proven that **color** is not a reliable criterion to judge if a hamburger has been heated to a level that will kill bacteria that may cause foodborne illness. Internal temperature is the best food safety criterion for doneness of any meat. You can only determine the safe temperature for burgers by using a thermometer, for example, a quick-response digital thermometer or a disposable T-stick thermometer inserted sideways into the center of the cooked burger.

The recommended safe temperature is **160 °F**. Keep in mind that

“Cocky E. Coli”



the burger might still be pink inside after reaching 160 °F, but it will be safe from bacteria that may cause foodborne illness. There are several reasons why ground beef may remain pink even after being cooked above 160 °F. The reasons are associated with factors like the pH and the level of pigment in the

meat, as well as the fat content. In fact, lowfat beef patties may require longer cooking times and higher cooking temperatures than higher fat beef patties to reach a safe internal temperature.

The opposite can also be true: a burger may be brown inside but may not yet have reached the safe temperature of 160 °F. This is primarily caused by extensive oxidation of the fresh ground beef pigment and can occur, for example, with prolonged thawing of frozen ground beef or refrigerator storage of thawed ground beef.

When you use temperature as your guide when cooking hamburgers, you can serve them with confidence that you are protecting children from foodborne illness. ▀

USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Educational Materials Database

The USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center provides a wide range of information about the prevention of foodborne illness. The center, under an agreement between FSIS and FDA, was established as part of a national campaign to reduce the risk of foodborne illness and to increase knowledge of food-related risks from production through consumption. The educational materials database is updated continually and includes a description of the materials, their cost, and how to order them. Following are examples of some of the items available from the center. You can access the database at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne>.

- **Food Protection Video Series**
- Developed for adult food

professionals and food handlers. Videotape covers five major topics: (1) Food Safety and Personal Hygiene; (2) Receiving, Storing, and Recordkeeping; (3) Thawing, Cooking, Cooling, and Holding Food; (4) Serving; and (5) Cleaning and Sanitizing.

- **Food Safety Is No Mystery** - Developed for front-line food service workers. Videotape and print materials include four modules in a mystery format in which the mystery to be solved is looking for the source of illness. The four modules are “Sanitation,” “Food Preparation,” “Contamination,” and “Safe Cooling and Reheating.”
- **The Food Safety Training Manual** - Developed for adult food professionals and food

handlers. Training manual covers safe methods for handling and preparing foods; State food code requirements; personal hygiene; receiving and storing foods; thawing, food preparation, and cooking; thermometer calibration; serving food and storing leftovers; and cleaning food storage and preparation areas.

- **Glo-Germ** - Developed for food service workers, children, adolescents. Kit helps teach hand washing, aseptic techniques, and general infection control. The kit consists of an oil, a powder, and a special fluorescent lamp. The oil and powder contain plastic “germs,” and the lamp reveals the germs. Workers/students apply either the oil or the powder and then work through their normal hand-washing procedure. The fluorescent lamp is then used to spot any remaining germs. ▀

Understanding Pack Dates on Commodities

Because of recent increasing concern about food safety issues, questions continue to be raised about “pack dates” on commodities. When dealing with these questions, it’s important to remember that USDA purchases commodities from the same vendors who pack for commercial markets, and “pack dates” are the same as those on all containers. No additional or separate information is required on commodities. The “pack date” indicates when the product was packaged and processed. The “pack date” is printed on some inner (primary) containers that hold the commodity. This date is on all outer (secondary) containers that hold commodities, that is, the cardboard box.

FDA’s nutrition labeling regulations of 1993 require the following items to be shown only on certain canned foods: (1) the establishment where packed, (2) the product contained therein, (3) the year packed, (4) the day packed, and (5) the period in which packed. Guidelines are given as to the length of the “period in which packed” so ready identification of packing lots can be made by vendors. However, many of the codes on cans, bags, and boxes are voluntary and differ widely among industries and among packers within an industry. For this reason, there isn’t a generic list of date codes.

Variations make clear the coding choices made by vendors, primarily for purposes of internal control and inventory. Vendors do use the codes

to answer customer inquiries or to respond to complaints. However, each request must be answered individually because each manufacturer has to identify the information in his company’s code.

It is important to understand that a “pack date” several months old does not mean the product is old. For example, peas—which are generally harvested and processed during June and July—will reflect one of those months plus the year of pack. Therefore, if a shipment arrives in March, the “pack date” will be from the previous year. Recipients may think they are getting an old product because of the 9-month-old date, but the product is wholesome and of good quality. In fact, it is the same domestic product that would be found on the grocer’s shelf at that time. This is true for most domestic fruit and vegetable products because they are harvested during the spring and summer months.

USDA purchases high-quality foods that are inspected by certified government inspectors. Commodities ordered in appropriate quantities, stored properly, and used by a scheduled time will present no cause for concern. ■

Child Nutrition Labeling vs. Nutrition Labeling

Q: What is CN labeling?

A: The Child Nutrition Labeling Program is a *voluntary* Federal labeling program administered by USDA’s FNS, in cooperation with several other agencies and departments. Under this program, FNS staff reviews a product formulation to determine the contribution a

single serving of that product makes toward the child nutrition meal requirements.

Q: What food products are eligible for CN labels?

A: Only two types of products are eligible to obtain CN label approval: (1) main dish products contributing significantly (at least 0.5 oz) toward the meat/meat alternate component of the meal pattern requirements and (2) juice drinks and juice drink products containing at least 50 percent full-strength juice by volume. CN-labeled products must be produced under Federal inspection.

Q: How does CN labeling work?

A: The federally approved CN label allows manufacturers to indicate directly on a product’s label that product’s contribution toward meal pattern requirements. It also provides a warranty against audit claims for purchasers of these products. A CN label statement does not ensure that a product is “nutritious” or “acceptable” to children, and the manufacturer must not use it to promote a product’s nutritional value or acceptability.

Q: What is nutrition labeling?

A: In 1989, FSIS joined with FDA to reform the food label. This label helps consumers follow the Dietary Guidelines developed by USDA and DHHS, which emphasize the importance of a well-balanced diet. FSIS regulations cover the labeling of meat and poultry products, and FDA regulations cover labeling of all other

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foods. Food companies are responsible for ensuring that their labeling material is accurate and in compliance with the applicable regulations.

Q: Is there a standard format for a nutrition label?

A: Information on the nutrient analysis of a product appears in a “Nutrition Facts” box on the label. The box format has been standardized so that information for all products will be uniform and therefore easier to read and use for comparisons.

Q: Must all foods have a nutrition label?

A: Some foods are exempt from nutrition labeling regulations. Among these exemptions are “institutional” foods. These foods are served in restaurants or institutions for immediate consumption since consumers will not see the product’s label. Although these foods are exempt, they are free to carry nutrition information, when appropriate, as long as it complies with the new regulations. However, this exemption does not apply if a nutrient content claim or health claim is made for that food.

Q: Must CN-labeled products contain nutrition labeling?

A: Since CN-labeled products are used in institutions participating in the Child Nutrition Programs, they would qualify for exemption from the new labeling regulations. However, many of the program operators who purchase CN-labeled products find nutrition information helpful, as they plan meals in accordance with the

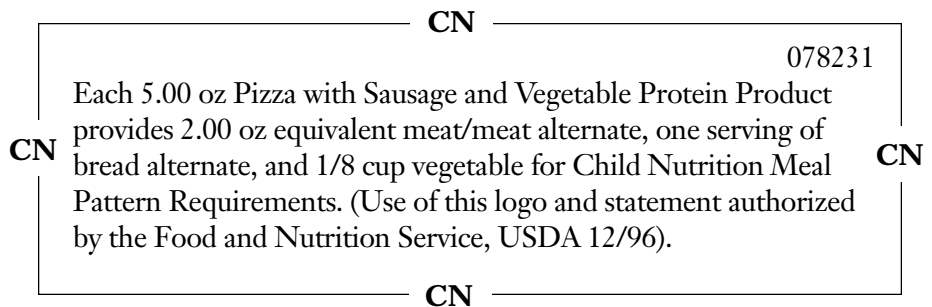
Dietary Guidelines. Therefore, they often request this information from their suppliers. For this reason, some manufacturers of CN-labeled products have opted to include nutrition information on their labels.

Q: What is the difference between CN labeling and nutrition labeling?

A: The CN label provides valuable information to program operators and participants with

regard to a product’s contribution toward meal patterns, while the new nutrition information label will provide accurate information about the product’s nutrient contributions. These two label components are regulated by different agencies and departments and present different types of information. Nevertheless, it is entirely acceptable for them to appear independently of one another on the same product label provided that each component complies with its respective regulation. ■

Sample CN Label



Eggs as Commodities

USDA offers two types of eggs as commodities to schools: frozen whole eggs and dried all-purpose egg mix. These products are convenient and versatile and can be used in many menu items. They are virtually indistinguishable from fresh eggs in nutritional value and flavor, and they have the added benefit of being safer to use because they are pasteurized to destroy *salmonella* and other bacteria.

Frozen Whole Eggs are packed in 6/5-pound or 30-pound cartons. The 5-pound packages are for use in individual school programs. The 30-pound cartons are used in

processing products for schools, for example, breakfast egg patties under a State or local contract.

Each 5-pound carton contains 45 large eggs. Three tablespoons of frozen egg equals one large egg. You can use these frozen whole eggs anywhere that you would use fresh shell eggs. **Because this product is pasteurized, you can use it safely in uncooked or slightly heated foods, such as milk drinks, ice cream, salad dressings, cream puddings, or soft custards.** It is equally useful for preparing thoroughly cooked breakfast entrees, lunch entrees, and in baking.

You should store frozen eggs in the freezer at 0 °F or below; they

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may be stored for up to 1 year. Always thaw eggs in the refrigerator (35 to 40 °F) in a closed container. Thaw only the amount needed, and use thawed eggs within 24 hours.

In the frozen state, the egg color may range from yellow to yellow orange or even reddish orange. In a completely thawed state before mixing, the product may have a layered, thickened, lumpy appearance as a result of freezing and separation, and a clear reddish-orange liquid may be evident on the top layer. When thoroughly mixed, the thawed whole eggs will regain a uniform consistency and a yellow to yellow-orange color.

Dried All-purpose Egg Mix is packed in 4/10-pound bags and used in the same way as whole fresh or whole frozen eggs. One pound of all-purpose egg mix when reconstituted yields approximately the equivalent of 26 large eggs. When reconstituted, 7.2 ounces of all-purpose egg mix is equivalent to 12 large eggs.

Reconstitute all-purpose egg mix by weight, using 1 part egg mix with 2 parts water. Sift all-purpose egg mix into the required amount of warm water in a mixer bowl, and mix with a wire beater at low speed until well blended. Reconstitute only the quantity of dried egg mix needed for the recipe, and use it immediately. You can also sift the egg mix with the dry ingredients in a recipe and add the water to other liquid ingredients.

This product is also pasteurized and is therefore free of salmonella. It performs well in all products where frozen eggs might be used such as scrambled eggs, casseroles, baked products, egg-milk drinks, ice cream, or uncooked salad dressings.

Store unopened bags of dried egg mix in a cool, dry place for up to 15 months. Store opened portions of egg mix in the refrigerator either in the resealable bag or in a tightly closed container. 


Help for Children Without Health Insurance

We have a landmark opportunity to improve children's health. The new Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was created in the bipartisan Balanced Budget Act of 1997. CHIP provides health insurance to uninsured children and it is a jointly funded Federal-State program administered by DHHS. The Federal nutrition assistance programs can help in outreach efforts to enroll children in either Medicaid or CHIP.

More than 10 million American children (birth to age 19) have no health insurance. An estimated 4.7 million children are eligible for the Medicaid Program but are not enrolled. This is largely because families lack knowledge about Medicaid eligibility. However, many uninsured children are from working families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private health insurance. To serve these children, States can choose to expand their Medicaid Program, create a separate program, or a combination of the two. States are now designing and implementing their own individualized programs and giving their programs unique names.

USDA and several other departments have developed a series of initiatives to reach families with

children who may be eligible for these programs. Since recipients of USDA nutrition assistance programs constitute a large group of potentially eligible children, FNS is playing a key role in these outreach efforts. We need your help to reach as many children as possible.

You may be able to access CHIP and Medicaid materials in your State so that you can display posters, distribute information (in newsletters, on your Web sites, in conferences and workshops), or otherwise participate in outreach to uninsured children. Most States now have toll-free phone numbers where you can refer families for more information. If you do not know the State's toll-free number, families can call the national number that will automatically connect them to the CHIP office in their State. The national toll-free number is 1-877-KIDS-NOW. You may find additional information about CHIP and the Medicaid Program on DHHS' internet Web site at <http://www.insurekidsnow.gov> and on FNS' Web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns>. 

Useful Internet Addresses

USDA

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services
<http://www.fns.usda.gov>
Food Distribution
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd>
Team Nutrition
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn>

Food Safety

Foodborne Illness Information Center
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne>
Food Safety Training and Education Alliance
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/fstea>
Food Safety Education Month
<http://www.foodsafetycouncil.org>
Fight BACTM
<http://www.fightbac.org>

How Can I Use Sweet Potatoes?

USDA purchases canned and frozen sweet potatoes (mashed and whole) for schools. Sweet potatoes are a great source of beta carotene (a form of vitamin A), vitamin C, and fiber. However, sometimes it is a challenge to find ways to serve them that are appealing to the children you serve.

Here are two recipes that offer different and tasty ways to use commodity sweet potatoes. (Please note that these recipes have been supplied by a school district and by industry and have not been tested for yield or standardized by USDA.)

Sweet Potato Biscuits

Weights

Chilled margarine or butter	7 lb
Sweet potatoes*	21 lb
Granulated sugar	9 lb
Pastry flour	2 lb
Baking powder	1 lb
Baking soda	1½ oz
Pastry flour	15 lb

With paddle attachment of mixer, combine margarine, sweet potatoes, and sugar. Sift together the flour, baking powder, and baking soda. Add to ingredients in mixer bowl, mixing slightly on low speed. Weigh second amount of flour and sift. On low speed, gradually add flour to other ingredients. **DO NOT BEAT**. Roll out dough to a ½" thickness and cut 2" in diameter. Place cut biscuits on greased baking pan. Bake in a 350 °F **convection oven** for 25 to 30 minutes. Yield: 30 dozen (360 servings)

*If using syrup pack, drain and weigh.

Courtesy of Don Trumble, Washington County Board of Education, Hagerstown, Maryland

Nutritional information per biscuit: Calories 214; Protein 2 g; Carbohydrates 34 g; Total Fat 7.3 g; Saturated Fat 1.4 g; Cholesterol 0 mg; Vitamin A 260 RE; Vitamin C 2 mg; Iron 1.3 mg; Calcium 84 mg; Sodium 260 mg; Dietary Fiber 1 g

Sweet Potato Pie Bars

Weights

Measures

Crust:

Flour	3 c
Oats	1½ c
Brown sugar, packed	1½ c
Margarine or butter	1½ c

Combine flour, oats, brown sugar, and margarine until crumbly. Press mixture into two greased 18" x 12" baking pans. Bake in a **convection oven** at 300 °F for 20 minutes or until golden brown.

Filling:

Sweet potatoes, mashed	2 lb 13 oz	
2% (part skim) evaporated milk	six 12-oz cans	
Frozen whole eggs (or shell eggs)		2⅔ c (1 doz)
Sugar		4½ c
Ground cinnamon		2 Tbsp
Ground ginger		1 Tbsp
Ground cloves		1½ Tbsp
Salt		1 Tbsp

Beat sweet potatoes, evaporated milk, eggs, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and salt until smooth. Pour over crust. Bake in a 300 °F **convection oven** for 35 minutes.

Topping:

Brown Sugar	1½ c	
Walnuts, chopped	1 c	
Margarine or butter, softened	⅓ c	1 Tbsp

Combine brown sugar, nuts, and margarine. Sprinkle over the top of filling. Bake an additional 10 to 15 minutes in a 300 °F **convection oven** until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool and cut each pan 6 x 8. Yield: 96 bars

Nutritional information per bar: Calories 164; Protein 3 g; Carbohydrate 25 g; Total Fat 5.5 g; Saturated Fat 1.2 g; Cholesterol 28 mg; Vitamin A 265 RE; Vitamin C 4 mg; Iron .7 mg; Calcium 77 mg; Sodium 159 mg; Dietary Fiber 0 g

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Acronym List

AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service	FDPIR	Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations
CHIP	Children's Health Insurance Program	FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
CN	Child Nutrition	FSA	Farm Service Agency
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services	FSIS	Food Safety Inspection Service
DOD	Department of Defense	HACCP	Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points
DSCP	Defense Supply Center Philadelphia	NFSMI	National Food Service Management Institute
FDA	Food and Drug Administration	NSLP	National School Lunch Program
FDD	Food Distribution Division	RFP	Request for Proposal
FDP	Food Distribution Programs	USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

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